

Should Evan Fontaine Give Up "Sonny" Whitney?

Evan Burrowes Fontaine, the celebrated dancer, whose breach of promise suit against the son of the rich and fashionable Harry Payne Whitney raises an interesting moral question

This striking photograph of Miss Fontaine was made shortly after the time when she alleges that "Sonny" Whitney fell madly in love with her exotic beauty



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FOR the sake of the moral problems raised I am asked and am consenting to discuss the Fontaine-Whitney breach of promise suit that is attracting such widespread interest. This case presents in concrete form many vital questions centering at this moment about marriage.

To clear the way for a clear-cut facing of these ethical issues let me say—First—Nothing here written is intended to be for or against either side, so far as evidence as to the facts is concerned. All that belongs to the courts. I am, for the discussion's purposes, assuming that Evan Burrowes Fontaine's allegations are substantially true as to the facts, without in any degree even intimating that they actually are so.

Second—Both Evan Fontaine and "Sonny" (Cornelius Vanderbilt) Whitney, if Evan Fontaine's assertions are veracious, were utterly wrong in maintaining the relations she alleges they did out of wedlock. Nothing can justify such flagrant violation of the Seventh Commandment.

Evan Fontaine's hope of being eventually divorced from her husband, Adair, excused her not in the slightest in her course. To trample the marital obligation just because effort is being made to break it does not in any wise lessen the offense.

Neither does Whitney's comparative youth free him from condemnation. Any young man who is old enough to be a junior or a senior at a great university is old enough and enlightened enough to be held to account for violation of the Seventh Commandment if he is guilty of it.

The great moral question is: Should Evan Fontaine give up Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney? Granting that her main declarations are truthful, that Whitney promised marriage and is the father of her two-year-old son, should she, out of consideration for Whitney's high social standing and the feelings of Whitney's fiancée—a girl of his own station in life—forego her own interests and those of her boy and leave Whitney unmolested?

To this question I answer "No!"

I take this case as the opportunity to preach what needs to be proclaimed from the housetops—that the rights of the child ought to have first place.

The child did not ask to be born. The child has a future that means as much to it as young Whitney's does to him, or Evan Fontaine's to her. Parents when they become progenitors of a human being have no other privilege or duty so great as that of giving the child the best possible chance to get on well.

Their own comfort, the disgrace that may be occasioned their families, the supposed bar to wedlock offered by the wide gulf fixed between the class of society in which the one parent moves and that to which the other belongs are mere trifles compared with the child's inherent right to an honest go at life.



The dancer in another pose that has been much admired by artistic connoisseurs as well as impressionable college students

"NO!" Says Rev. Dr. Young in a Vigorous Discussion of the Serious Moral Aspects of the Dancer's Suit Against the Harry Payne Whitney's Young Million-Heir College Boy

of blessing it with a home, is the crime of crimes.

You would have even less excuse for urging, after a man of social standing has murdered some one of low estate, that the murderer's elegant connections forbid his being brought to book for his foul deed. The one ends a life that has had some years of the pursuit of happiness. The other thrusts a life into misery from the start.

Years ago, when New Jersey law required the minister to make out at the time of performing a wedding ceremony a paper setting forth, among other things, the names of the parents of the contracting parties, I performed the service for a couple, the bride being a member of my church.

When I asked her for her parents' names she broke down and through her sobs said: "My father never fulfilled his promise to my mother."

If there be one spot in hell a little more uncomfortable than any other it should be reserved for the scoundrel who dooms his child to a living hell like that.

If I could condone any set of mortals for turning Bolsheviks and starting out to bomb the world to smithereens that set would be the children who are so doomed. Any locality that has a considerable percentage of them is a disgrace to civilization. And it is not they who should hide their faces, but the so-called respectable people who fail to flame forth against cowardice, the treachery to one's own flesh and blood.

Every word I am putting down against

any man who turns traitor to his offspring I am putting down also against any woman who, from vile, selfish motives, inveigles and seduces a young man into such a relationship.

"Remember the weakness of human nature," you plead. Yes, and remember the rights of that other human nature—the babe that is thrust into the world with nobody to look up to and call father.

Why not start a crusade on this question? Why not lift a banner inscribed with the legend: "For every child, two parents"? Carry that banner into the lewd dance halls and say to the proprietors and the dancers: "In your exciting pastime do not pander to the instincts that may lead to a lad or lass being fated to wander through life unblest with a decent parentage."

Carry the banner into the motion-picture house and say: "See to it that no film exhibited here tends to break down the sacred family ideal, to revert to the brute revelry of mere passion."

Carry the banner into the publishing houses and warn the book makers and magazine producers: "Let no salacious line befoul your pages, lest in the Great Day of Judgment it be found that you helped to send some mortal into forty or fifty or sixty or seventy years of unhappiness."

Carry the banner to the bathing grounds and the fashion plate-makers and to all who laugh at the prudery, as they label it, of such as hold to old-time religious ideals of matrimony, and declare: "That is not prudish or out of date which protects the immortal little mortal from the blight of parent-made orphanage."

Evan Fontaine's two-year-old love child—the son, she alleges, of Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney

Carry the banner to the trysting place of illicit love and bring them to their senses by saying: "Hear the voice of the yet unborn and obey God's holy law."

Something would be left out of this Fontaine-Whitney discussion if praise were not given to the woman who in her devotion to her faithless lover forever shields him from the infamy that falls upon herself alone. She never tells his name. That devotion is lovely in spirit—but wrong in act. She owes it to her own flesh and blood to require that lover to return and be a man, a husband, a father, to rear together—he and she—the tiny creature entrusted to them.

The man who is guilty of one such outrage against the oncoming generation and escapes unflayed of justice will be likelier to blight other lives.

Would you not think his dreams would be haunted by the faces of the wronged? Would you not expect him to hear the sobs of the mother and the baby?

No; such a man will, nine times out of ten, become case-hardened, hypocritical, brazen, impervious to all appeals.

No preaching is more needed to-day than that of the sacredness of human life. No application of the Golden Rule is more appropriate than to urge parents to be as considerate of children as they would wish the children to be were their cases reversed.

In the last analysis, the bulwarks of the faith your old-fashioned forbears held indispensable are indispensable now. You cannot play fast and loose with these solemn responsibilities and not be a criminal at last.

Out West, in frontier sections, men had a rough way of going to the recreant lover who had overstepped the bounds of loverliness and holding their revolvers aimed at him while the parson pronounced him and the girl man and wife.

A better way is for the entire community to cultivate a high honor, a true appreciation of each child's right to be in a home—not in a herd. It would save many a heartache if all should heed the commandment that bids us be chaste—for the sake of those who are to follow us.



Miss Marie Norton, the society girl, whom "Sonny" Whitney is said to be eager to marry

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